

Happy Birthday to me (to you!) by ej_writer

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Summary:

Max wants to have a party for Billy's 19th birthday, so she turns to Steve.

Happy Birthday to me (to you!)

The first summer after the incident at Starcourt, things have finally had enough time to slowly ease back into normalcy.

The day after school lets out, the kids talk Steve into letting them come swim in his pool. It's only for a couple of hours, and honestly, it does them all some good, the kids getting to pretend things are okay for a while, and Steve getting to soothe that worry that crept in every time he didn't have an eye on all of them, so despite the guilt they all certainly felt for having fun, they let themselves enjoy it, for a little while at least.

The gimmick of what made summer fun ran out pretty quickly for them though, so once they'd all gotten sunburnt shoulders and had tangles in their hair and wrinkles on their fingers from the chlorinated water, they decided it was time to go home. They weren't up for the arcade or ice cream after the pool like they used to be either, but they had had just under a year now to decide they were okay with that.

So Steve loads them all up into his new Mercedes-Benz, the replacement for the BMW that became necessary post battle when they discovered his car had been crushed at some point during that night by the Mind Flayer, and took them all home.

Max's house was the last on his route no matter which way he went, the only member of the party who lived on the outskirts of the wealthy part of town now that the Byers' had moved, so it's just the two of them in the car. As they pull up outside though, she hesitates to get out, instead nervously picking at the stitches in the seat, mulling over something in her head.

They aren't really close, no bond between them beyond babysitter and grumpy teenager not happy to have one, but Steve feels an obligation towards *all* of these kids, so he shifts in the seat so he's facing her, and asks her in a way he hoped sounds approachable, "What's up, Max?"

Max takes another second and a deep breath before speaking,

wringing her hands nervously, “Billy’s birthday is in a few days and I don’t think anybody knows that, but I want to do something for him.”

Steve nods, doesn’t really know what he’s supposed to do at first, “Have you talked to your mom about this?”

He asks because word traveled fast in a small town like Hawkins. Everyone and their mother knew that Neil Hargrove had split before they’d even stabilized his son in the hospital, and his wife had stayed with their children, taking full responsibility for Billy and Max. If anyone should be having a party for Billy, it should be Susan.

“Yeah and she liked the idea, but she’s been really busy with work and stuff, double now with Billy’s medical bills, and I know a lot of the other parents are too and some of them I just don’t know well enough to ask, and I don’t know who else to turn to because normally I’d take this stuff to Billy and I can’t do it by myself.” Max rambles all in one breath, has clearly been thinking about this for a long time.

Steve obviously wants to encourage that, so he asks, “What did you wanna do for him?”

“I just wanted to have a party for him at the hospital, but I know that’s kinda dumb since nobody goes to see him anyways.” Max mumbles, wrapping her fingers around the door handle like she’s going to get out, “I don’t know, it’s stupid.”

“No it’s not. What day is it, his birthday?”

“The sixth. I know that’s kinda short notice but-“ Max starts again, but Steve interrupts, a small smile on his face as if to prove he’s genuine, “No, it’s fine. We’ll figure something out. We’re not going to let Billy be alone on his birthday.”

It doesn’t seem to have the effect Steve wanted though, because Max scoffs and pushes the car door open, snapping before she gets out, “You do every other day.”

Even though Max had been so short with him at first, after that, she and Steve work on a plan at the end of every day when he was

driving her back home, Max slowly evolving from tense about even bringing it up to actually excited for this thing they were working on together for her brother.

Steve doesn't really have the time or the know-how for home made anything, but he buys everything you typically would find at an under twenty one birthday party, balloons and streamers, a chocolate cake, per Max's request, and a tub of Superman ice cream, also a suggestion from Max.

He doesn't buy Billy a present, he figures he doesn't have use for much for anything material in the hospital, and although he's willing to help, he feels he still doesn't really *know* Billy like that anymore.

Or maybe he does, he just doesn't know if the friendship they had been reluctantly developing would withstand the strain the accident at Starcourt had put on it, and didn't feel it was very appropriate just to show up with an expensive knick knack that would just rub his wealth in Billy's face.

Instead, he gets him a card, because who doesn't want a birthday card, and leaves a hundred dollars and a heartfelt note in it. The money is because he has it and Billy needs it more than he does, and a hundred dollars was standard for milestone birthdays, in his family at least, and since Billy was lucky to see his nineteenth come around, he figures this counted.

So on the sixth of June, they're ready to celebrate Billy.

Steve drives the kids all to the hospital that day, surprised that even without El around right now to convince them to, they were all willing to come. He guesses they'd all seen how torn up Max was when Billy was admitted to the hospital, and now that eleven months later he still hadn't got out, it was bound to be hard on her.

It wasn't a surprise anymore, Max had let it slip to Billy a few days beforehand in her excitement, so they just went straight up to his room, each kid and Steve carrying something, decorations or food or presents.

At first, Billy doesn't really seem to thrilled to see them, but Steve

supposed he wouldn't be either, it couldn't be any fun aging in the hospital, especially surrounded by nobody but your little sisters friends.

But they still set it all up for him, tying balloons to his bed and hanging streamers above the door. Max sits with him and keeps him entertained with stories, but what makes his mood significantly improve is when a nurse interrupted them to give him another dose of his pain meds.

Once they're all set up, it's Lucas who points out, "We forgot the candles for the cake."

And it's Max who, without really thinking about it, reminds him, "We probably have some with all the decorations and stuff we bought."

It's Dustin who looks and finds a pack of candles that someone indeed had brought, and calls out, "Found some."

But it's Steve who is seemingly the only one able to remember that the birthday boy was still on oxygen after a lung transplant and didn't think he needed to be blowing out any candles, reminding Dustin very pointedly, "Actually, Dustin, I don't think we need any candles."

Of course he argues, because kids do, "C'mon Steve, it's a birthday cake. All birthday cakes have candles."

"Yeah, but I said I don't think this one needs any." Steve says, through his teeth this time, nodding subtly towards Billy, and Dustin's eyes widen a little, and the candles get put back without another word about it.

Instead, Steve gives Billy the zippo from his pocket, flipping it open for him so a tiny flame dances in front of his face, "Make a wish, Hargrove."

Billy takes the lighter, a little apprehensively, but he stays quiet, looking up at Steve as he presumably makes his wish to himself, then clicks it shut, extinguishing the flame.

Ever impatient, the kids decide that's their cue to cut into the cake

without really asking anybody, but Steve doesn't stop them, because as Billy reminds Max when she sits down on his bedside with a piece, "I can't really eat that right now, kiddo, but thank you."

She blows him off, teasingly uncaring in that sibling way, "Oh, I know, that's why I picked chocolate cake, 'cause I know you don't like it. I just wanted you to have one, so it felt like a real birthday."

Billy smiles wide, holds his arms out the best he can anymore for a hug, "Aww, come 'ere, shitbird."

Max spends the rest of their little impromptu party at his bedside, talking to her friends but sitting with her brother, the both of them chasing that sense of normalcy that everyone else had been able to move on and achieve, but they had no chance at grasping so long as they were apart.

That is at least, until to keep himself busy while the kids argue about something, Billy reads his card from Steve, that long written out note that detailed all his feelings and regrets and thoughts about Billy that he had been grappling with since Billy was hospitalized, sorrys and thank yous and happy birthday, everything crammed into that card but the part about how Steve had been falling in love with Billy since they met in '84.

It makes Steve nervous, twitchy and vulnerable with Billy reads it, until he gently closes the card and looks up at Steve, eyes wide and a little teary.

The first thing he says is an unrelated question, ruffling his little sisters hair and asking her, "Maxi, can you go down to the vending machine at the end of the hall and grab me some stuff? I'm running out of candy to hide in the bedside drawer."

Max nods and slides down from his bed, and Billy adds, "Take all your friends too. See if they want anything."

He waits until all the kids are gone, their voices echoing distantly down the long hallway, to ask Steve, "D'you do all this for me, Harrington?"

Steve shrugs, not sure if he's more humble or nervous about why Billy wanted to talk to him alone, "It was Max's idea."

"But you still organized it, right?"

"I guess. I don't want a thank you or anything though." Steve insists, but Billy smiles, a bright one like Steve hardly ever saw anymore, and insists right back "Too bad, you're getting one. Thank you."

Steve just shrugs again, "It's your birthday, Hargrove. I wasn't going to let you be forgotten."

"I would've been okay, Steve. Birthdays were just... never really a thing in my family anyways."

Steve can tell they were going to go back and forth all day, arguing over whether or not he should be celebrated, and if he needed someone by his side, if he doesn't change the subject, so he asks him, "What'd you wish for?"

"Can't tell you that or it won't come true." Billy hums, thoughtful, and he says, sounding like his sister, "And it's sort of dumb anyways."

"Hey, I'm sure it's not dumb. If it's something you want, it can't be."

Billy looks up at him, a little smile on his face, and explains, "I don't know it's just, I'm going to be sick for the rest of my life, I'm stuck in the hospital for another month at least and my dad disowned me, but, my wish still wasn't for any of that to change."

"What was it then?"

Billy takes a deep breath, a noticeable flush to his face, "I wished that I would have the guts to finally do this."

For a second Steve wonders what he's talking about, worries briefly that he was going to use the distraction and the relaxed attention from the nurses on his birthday to make grand escape from the hospital or something, until Billy leans up and kisses him.

It's chaste and it's sweet, everything that he'd expect from anybody that wasn't Billy Hargrove, and everything that Steve could ever have

wanted. He sits down on the bed beside Billy to make the angle easier on the both of them, not breaking the kiss for even a second, bringing his hand up to cup Billy's cheek, and deepening the kiss.

They're interrupted by the squeaking of tennis shoes on the waxy hospital floors in the hallway, the kids coming back already, so Steve pulls away, just as flushed as Billy was now and keeping one of his hands resting on top of Billy's, "Happy birthday, Billy."

Author's Note:

Today is my birthday! So have some birthday fluff!